

# Farmers' Mental Wellbeing in GA: A Statewide Survey

Stephanie Basey, MSHS<sup>2</sup>; Anne Montgomery, PhD<sup>1,2</sup>; Ben West,  
MBA<sup>1,2</sup>; Chris Scoggins, MPH<sup>1,2</sup>; Lily Baucom<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Georgia Rural Health Innovation Center; <sup>2</sup>School of Medicine, Mercer University;

<sup>3</sup>Georgia Foundation for Agriculture

## WHY & WHAT

- **Definition:** farmers = farm workers, farm managers, and farm owners
- Agricultural business is the **leading industry** in Georgia: 1 in 7 Georgians works in ag (USDA, 2020)
- **Mental well-being** is a term that conveys a more holistic view of mental health and has been found to resonate with rural residents in the Southeastern United States (Crowe, 2019)
- **Scarcity of literature** on agricultural workers' mental health; mostly suicide
- In the state of Georgia, the **suicide rate** among farm workers is 50.7 per 100,000 compared to 14.9 per 100,000 for the overall population in industry
- Many **specific issues:** lack of access to healthcare, stigma, immigration status, specific stressors

## WHY & WHAT

- **Longtime exposure to stress** negatively impacts physical and mental health (Kubo et al, 2015)
- This can **lead to** development of stress-related diseases and disorders (Kubo et al, 2015)
- **Study Goal:** Inventory stressors and coping mechanisms of farmers
- **Purpose:** developing tailored interventions to improve mental wellbeing of farmers

## METHOD

### METHOD

- Pilot survey: N = 536
- State-wide survey: N = 1,651
- Next steps:
  - Additional surveys in person to improve representation
  - Key Informant Interviews and/or focus groups to expound upon statewide survey

## METHOD

### STATEWIDE SURVEY

- Anonymous, took an average of 16.8 minutes to complete; EN + ES; Incentive: \$10
- Recruitment: commodity & farming groups; social media; newspaper and printed media
- Data collected January 1, 2022 – April 30, 2022
- **Includes:**
  - Participant demographics
  - Stressors and coping mechanisms for stress
  - Access to healthcare
  - Perceived Stress (PSScale + PANAS)

# SAMPLE

N = 1651

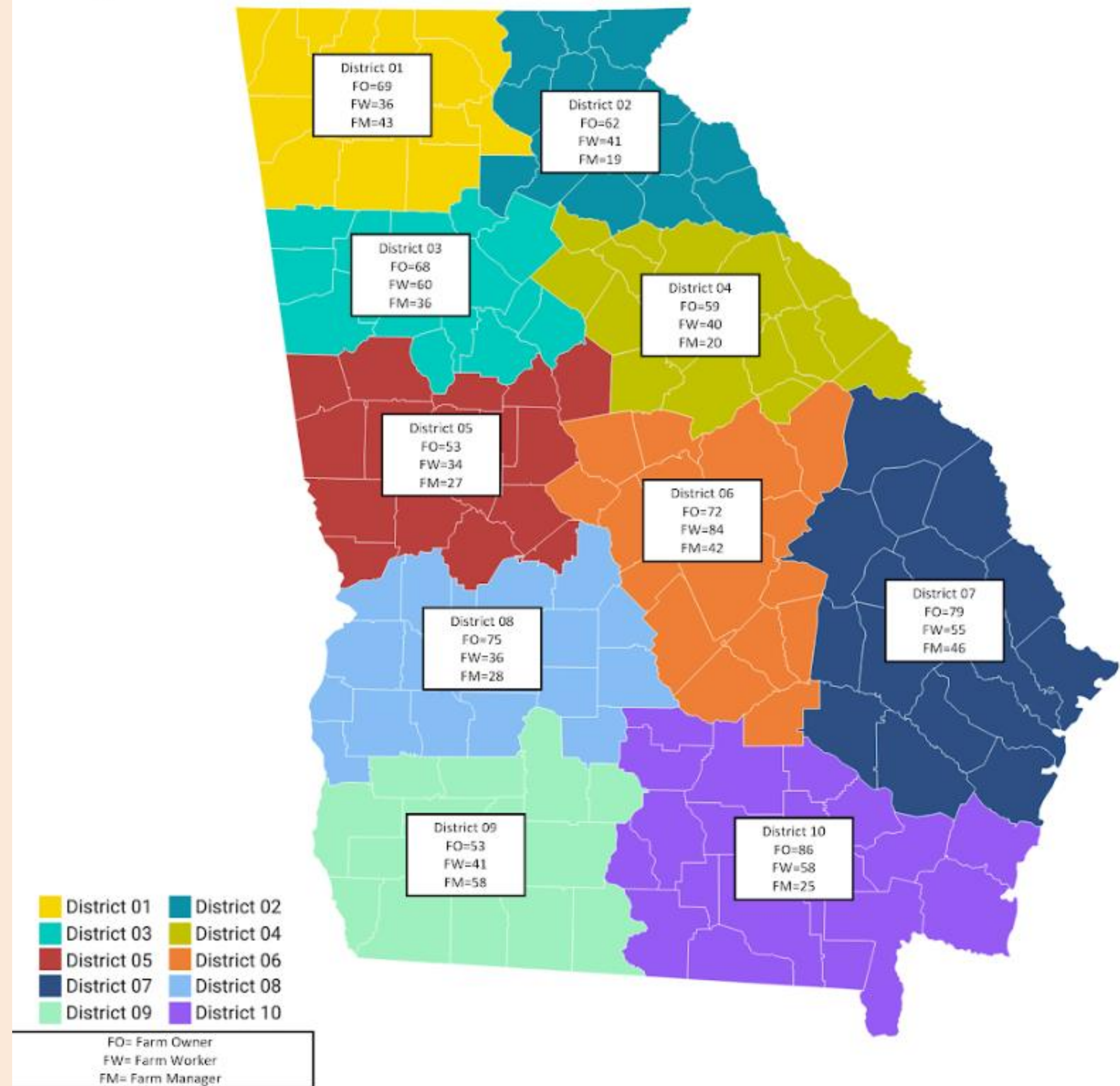
- 30% Farm Workers
- 19% Farm Managers/Supervisors
- 38% Farm Owners
- 12% Spouses
- 3% Other

Farm owners: 148 counties

Farm managers: 126 counties

Farm workers: 116 counties

Georgia Farm Bureau Regions



## AG CENSUS COMPARISON

### Statewide Survey Participants

Age – 44 ± 12.2

Gender – Male (62%)

Race – 18% AA/B

Ethnicity – 3% Hispanic

### Agricultural Census

Age – 57.9

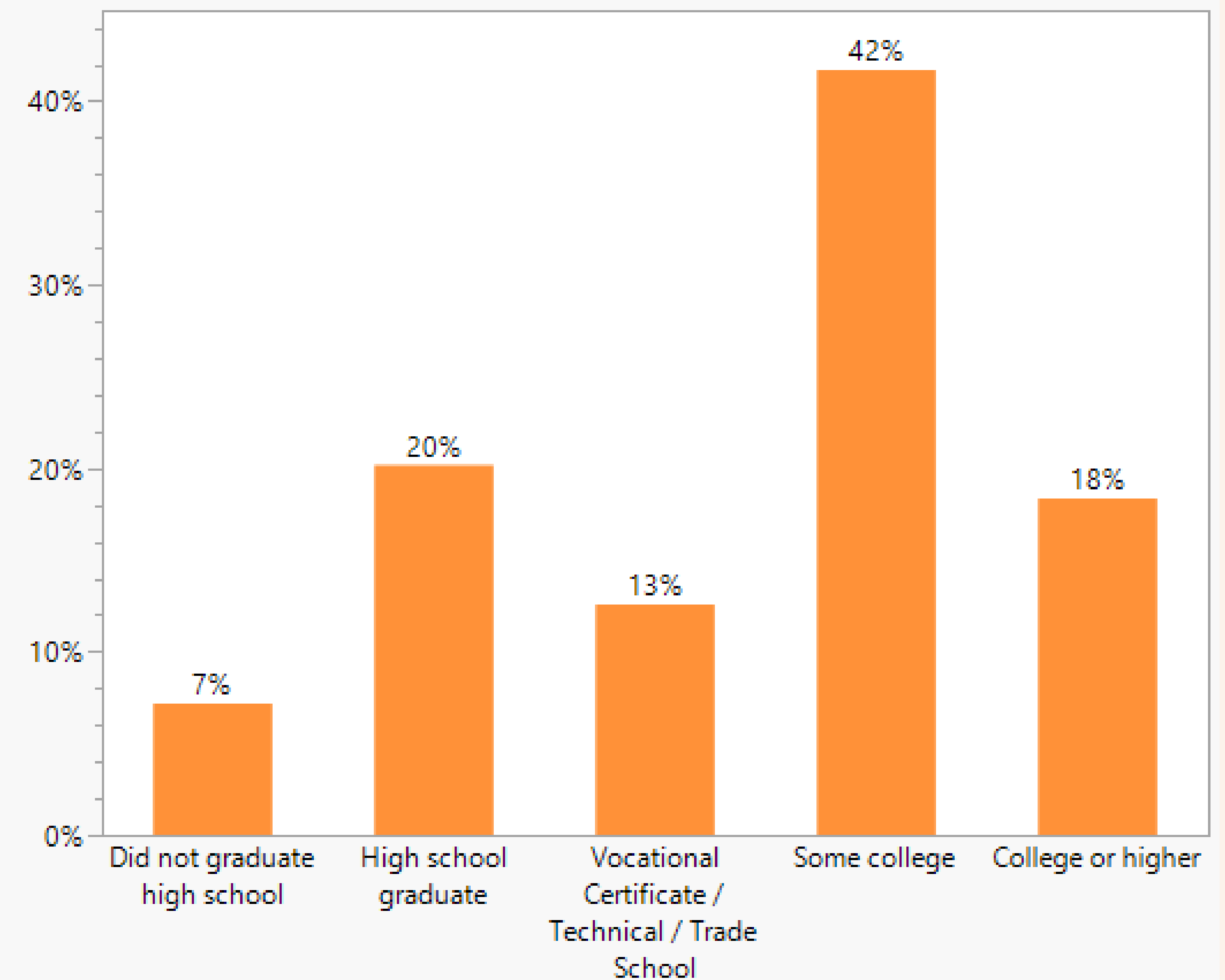
Gender – Male (66%)

Race – 8% AA/B

Ethnicity – 1% Hispanic

## DEMOGRAPHICS

- **Generational:** 59.0% First Generation
- **Marital Status:** 89% married or living with a partner
- **Children:** 69% had children
- **# Children:** 85% of parents had 1 – 2 children
- **Education:**





## DEMOGRAPHICS

- **Immigration Status:** 72% US citizens, 20% legal visa or greencard
- **Total Farming Operation Size:** 42% more than 300 acres
- **Number of Diverse Farms:** 2.3 average
- **Commodity type (cotton & wool, arable, pastoral):**

Cotton & Wool	Arable	Pastoral
21%	69%	67%

- **Work-life Balance**
  - **Works Year-Round, No Break:** 38%
  - **Works 50+hrs/week:** 32%

## MENTAL WELLBEING OUTCOMES: STRESSORS (TOP 10)

<b>Worry "moderately, a lot, or extremely" about:</b>	<b>All Farmers</b>
Balancing home and work life	61%
The weather and its effects on the farm	61%
COVID19's impact on income	59%
Saving for retirement	59%
Unexpected financial burdens	59%
Succession planning	56%
Getting COVID-19	54%
Health issues	54%
Changes to agricultural laws or policies	53%
Microaggressions	53%

## NEGATIVE EMOTIONS

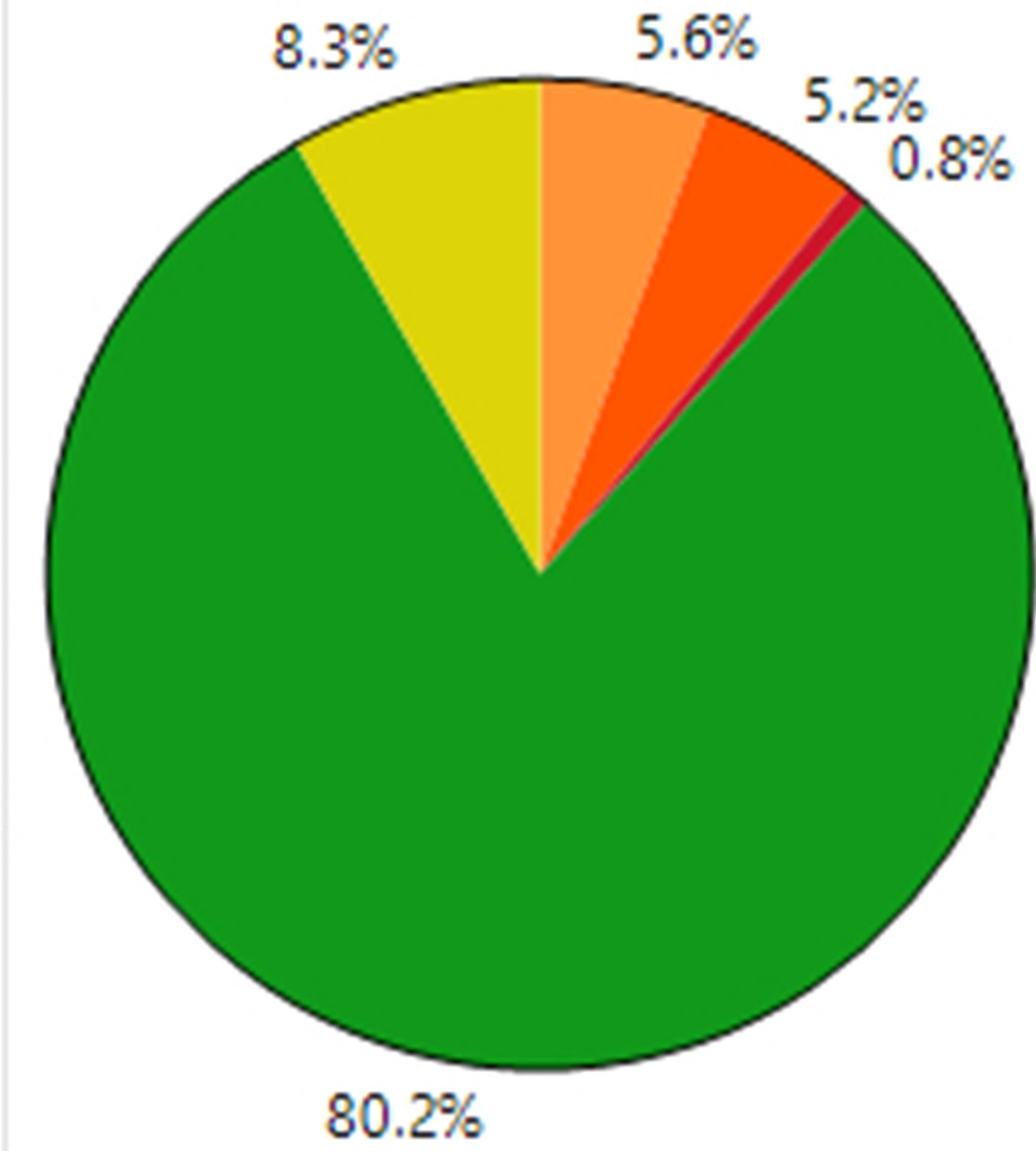
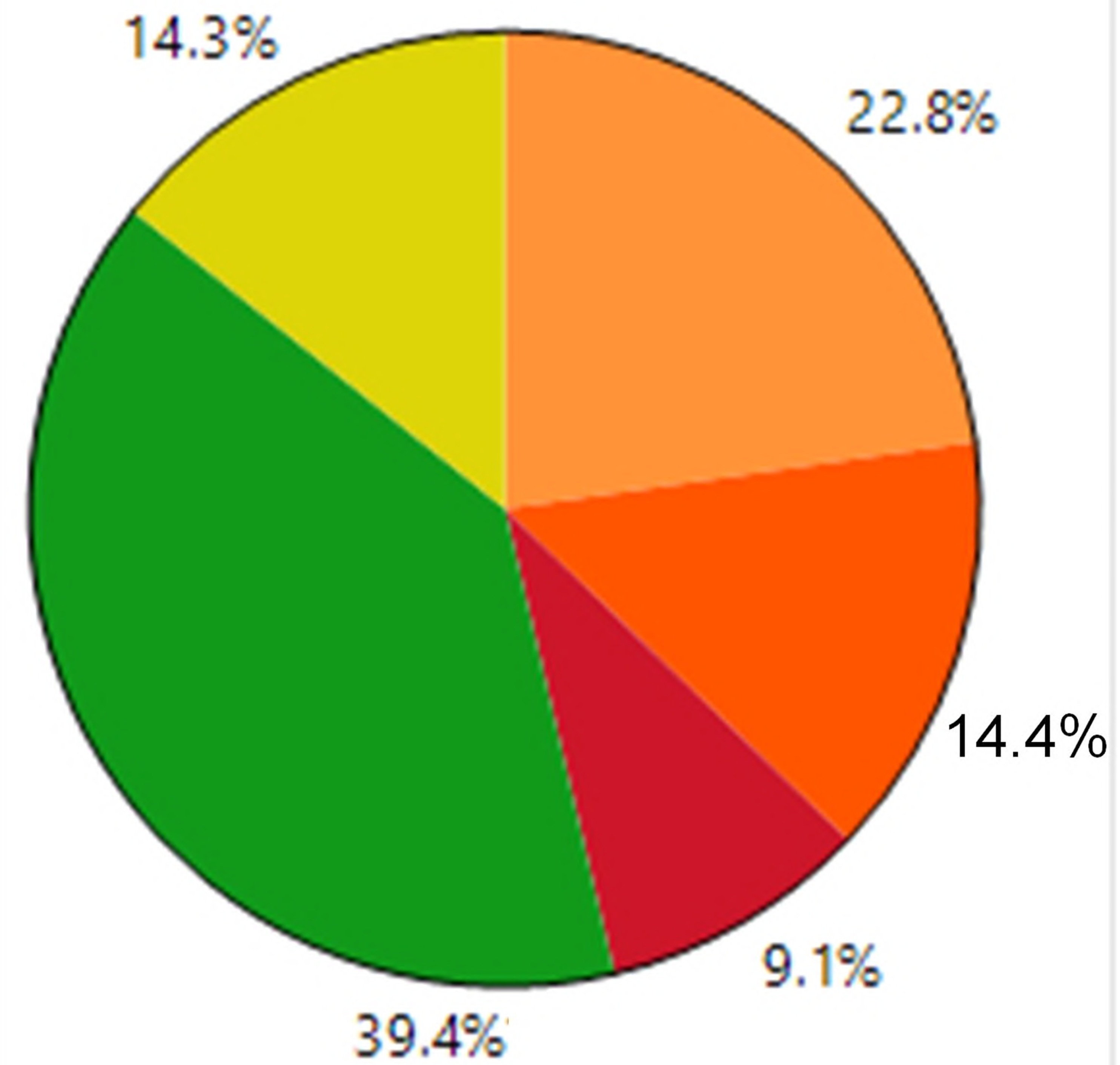
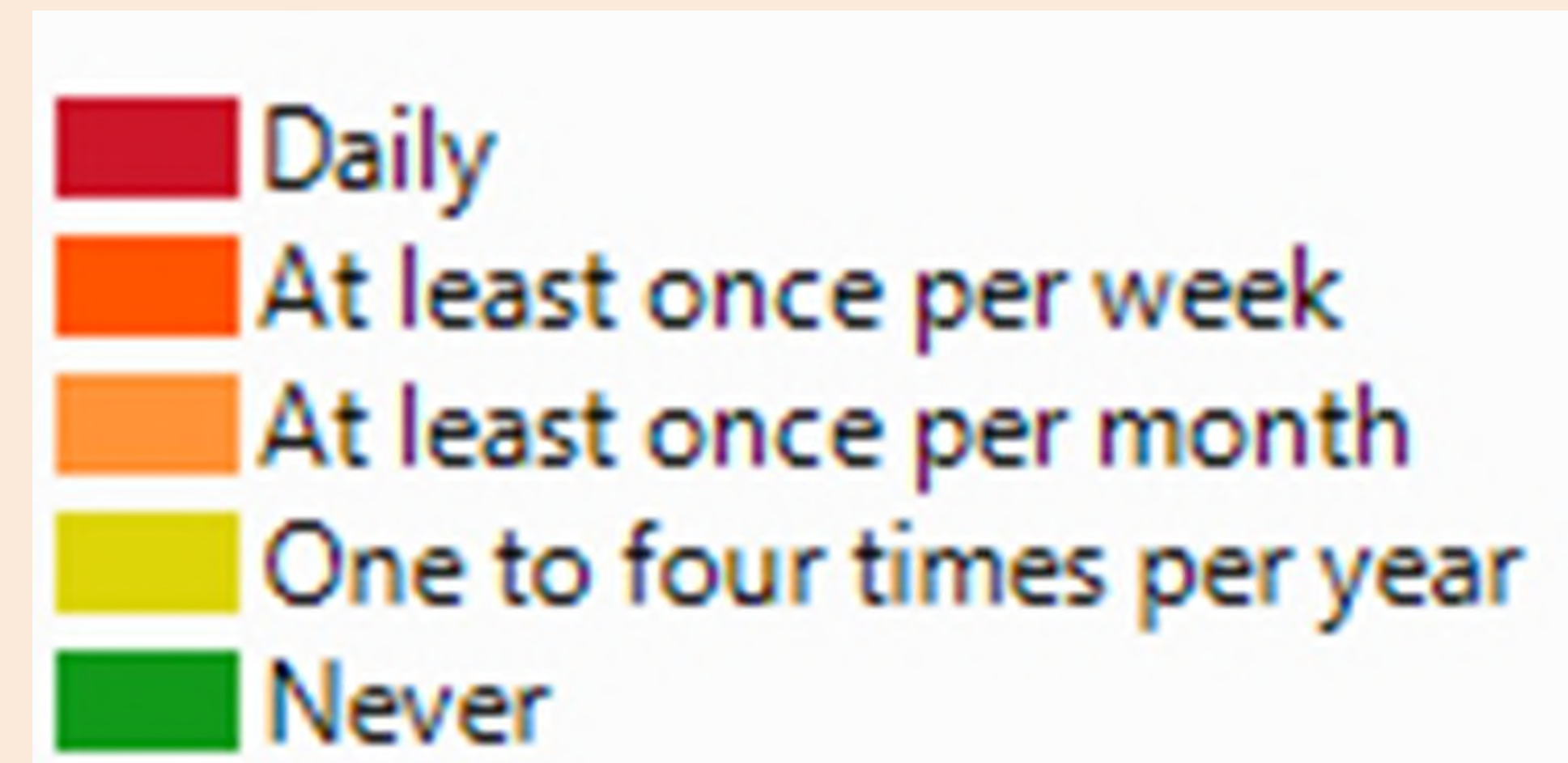
<b>At least once a month, they are feeling:</b>	All farmers
Lonely	47%
Sad or depressed	49%
Hopeless	39%
Thoughts of wanting to die by suicide	29%

## NEGATIVE EMOTIONS

### Suicidal Ideation by Generational Farming

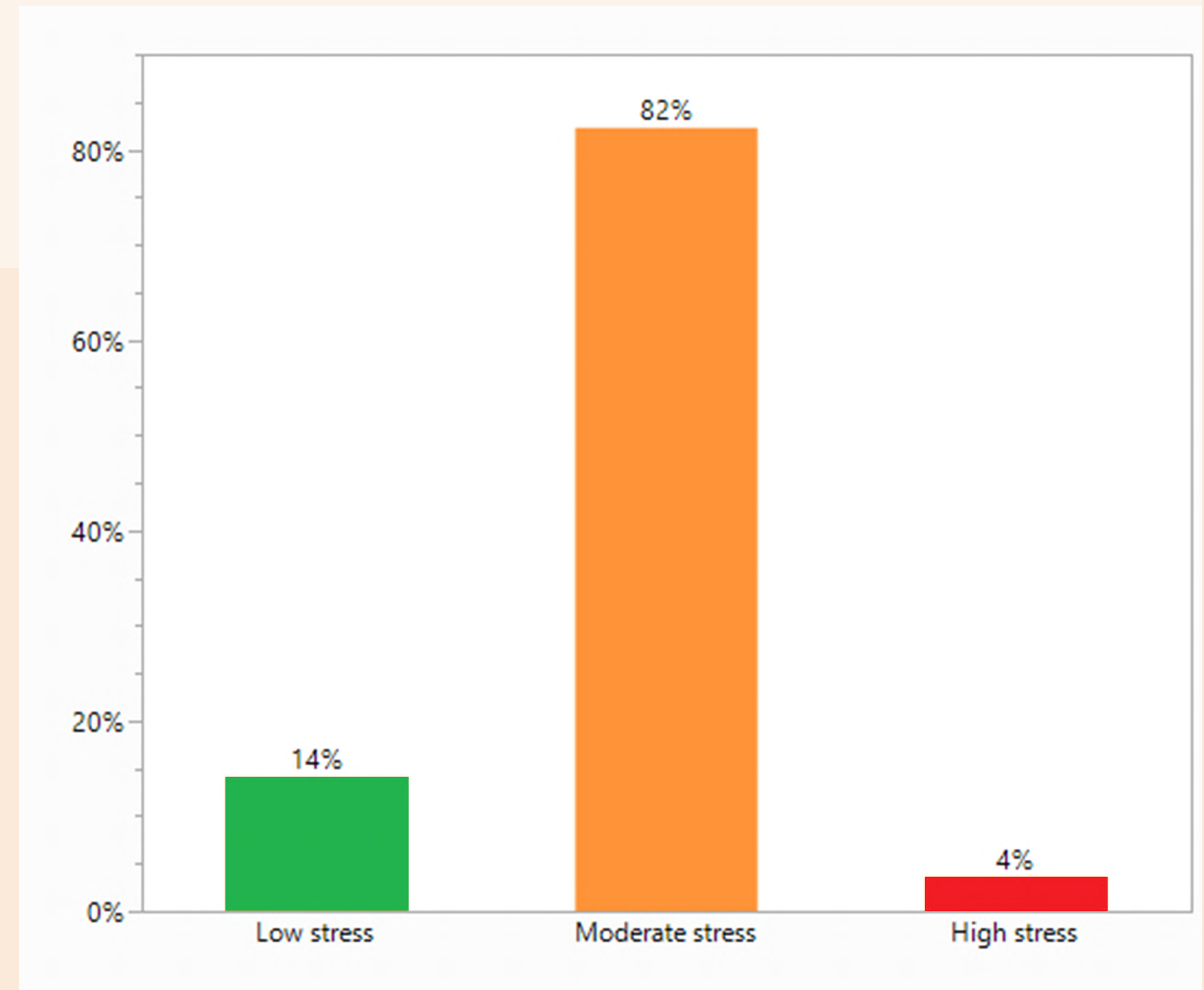
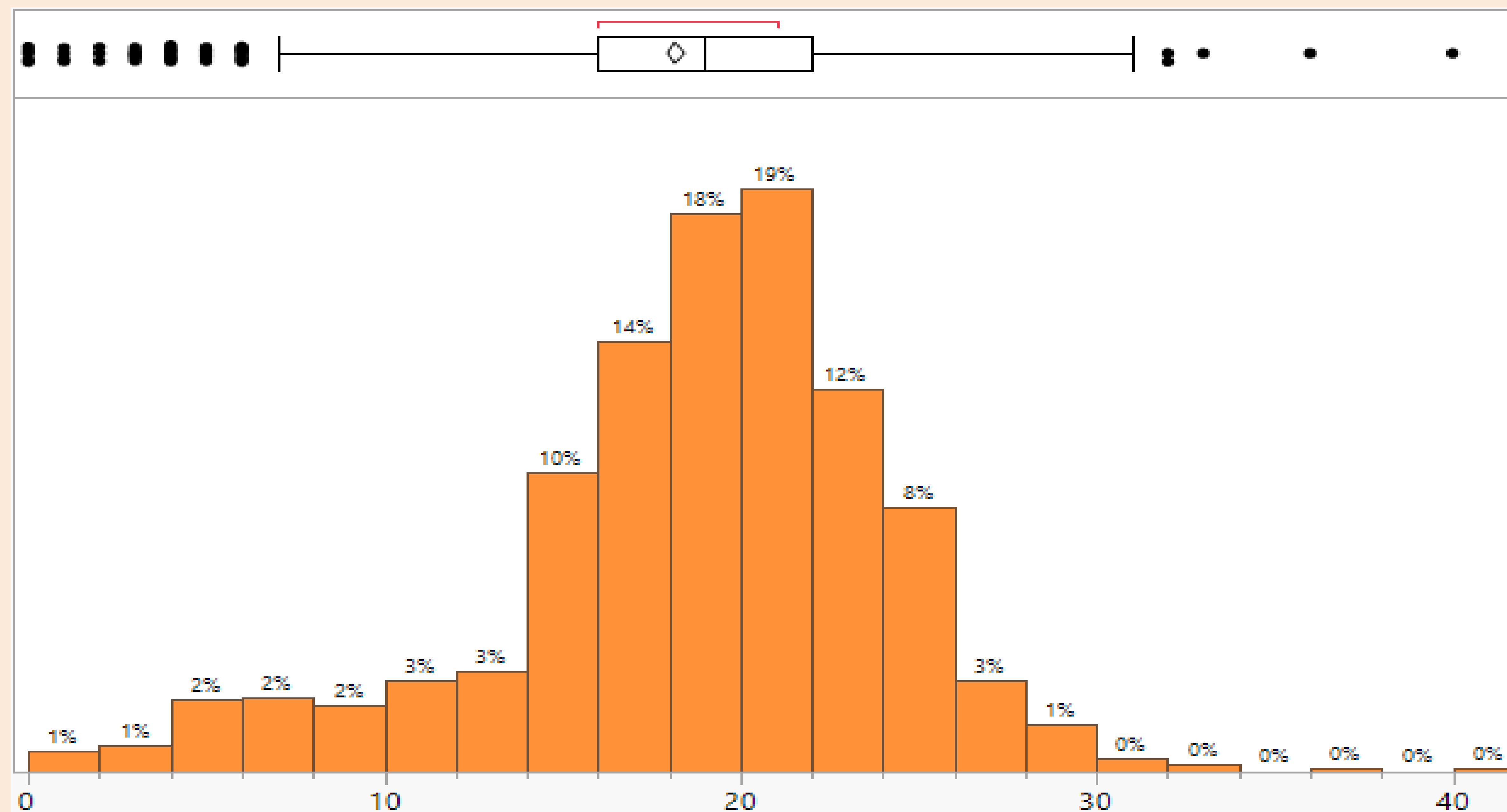
First Generation

Generational

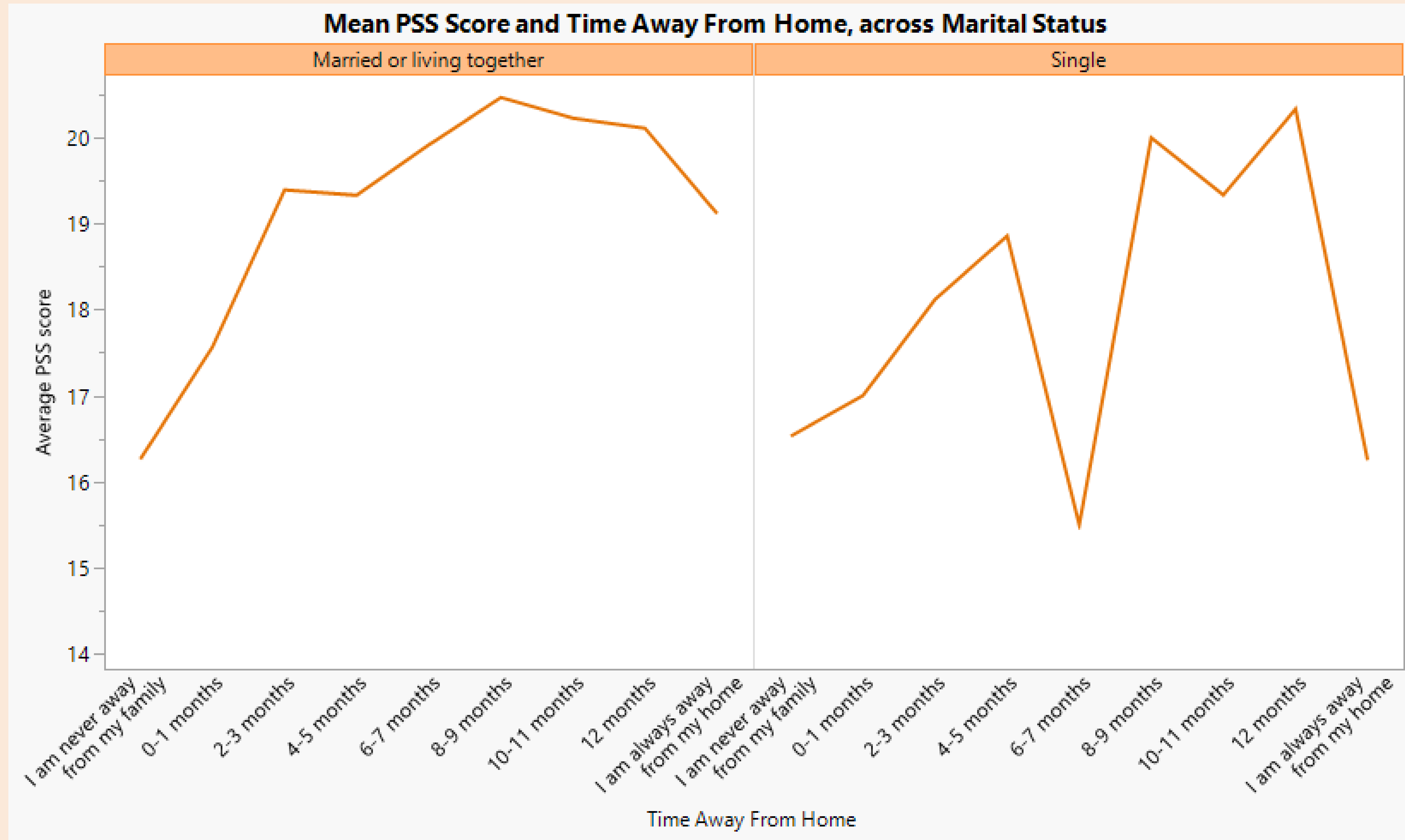


## PERCEIVED STRESS SCALE

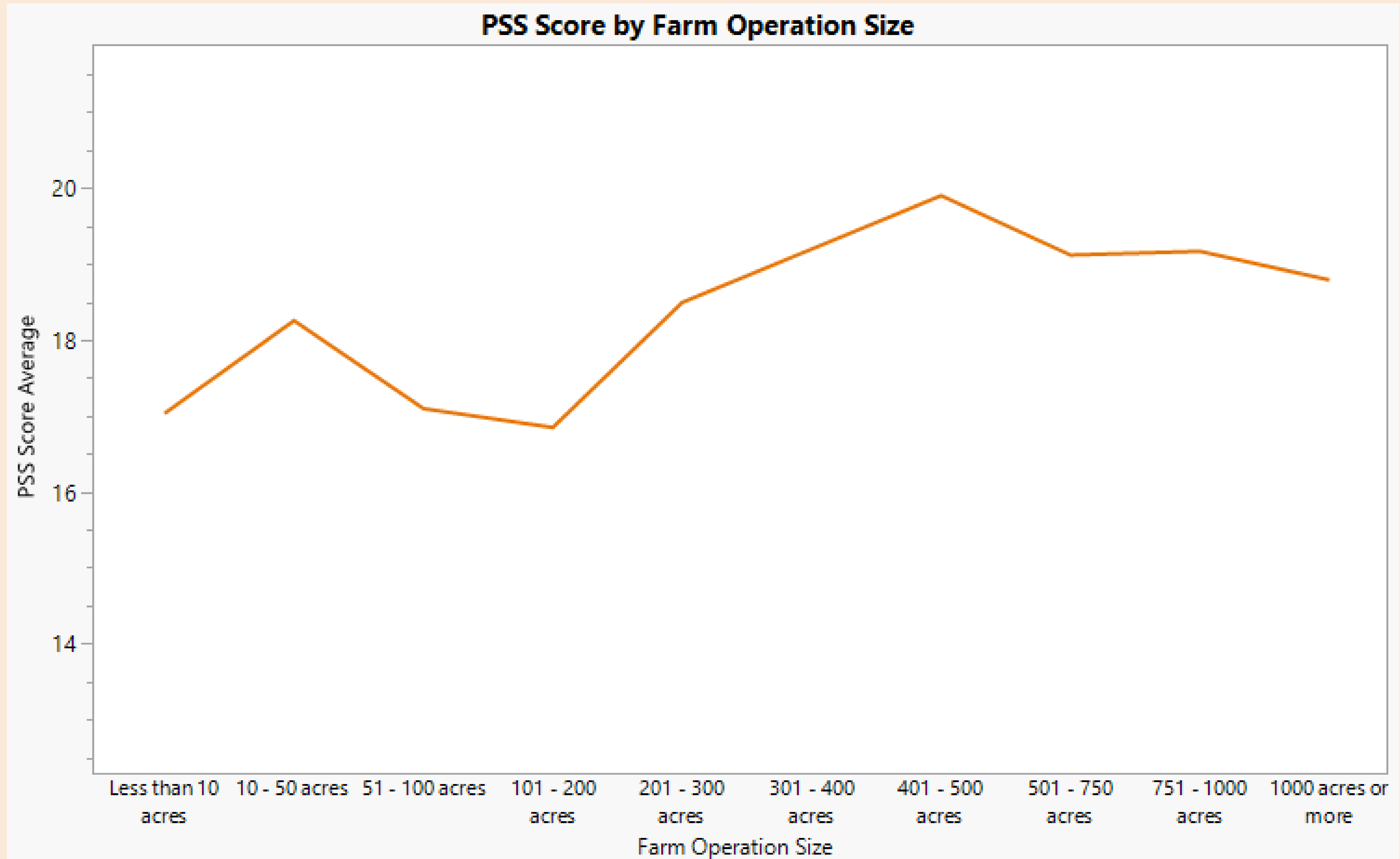
- Self-report measure for degree to which persons perceive situations in their life as excessively stressful relative to their ability to cope
- PSS Theoretical maximum = 40
- Stress: **LOW** = 0 – 13 ; **MODERATE** = 14 – 26; **HIGH** = 27 - 40
- **Our sample:**
  - **Mean (SD) = 18.2 (5.4)**



# PSS, TIME AWAY FROM HOME, MARITAL STATUS



## PSS BY FARM OPERATION SIZE



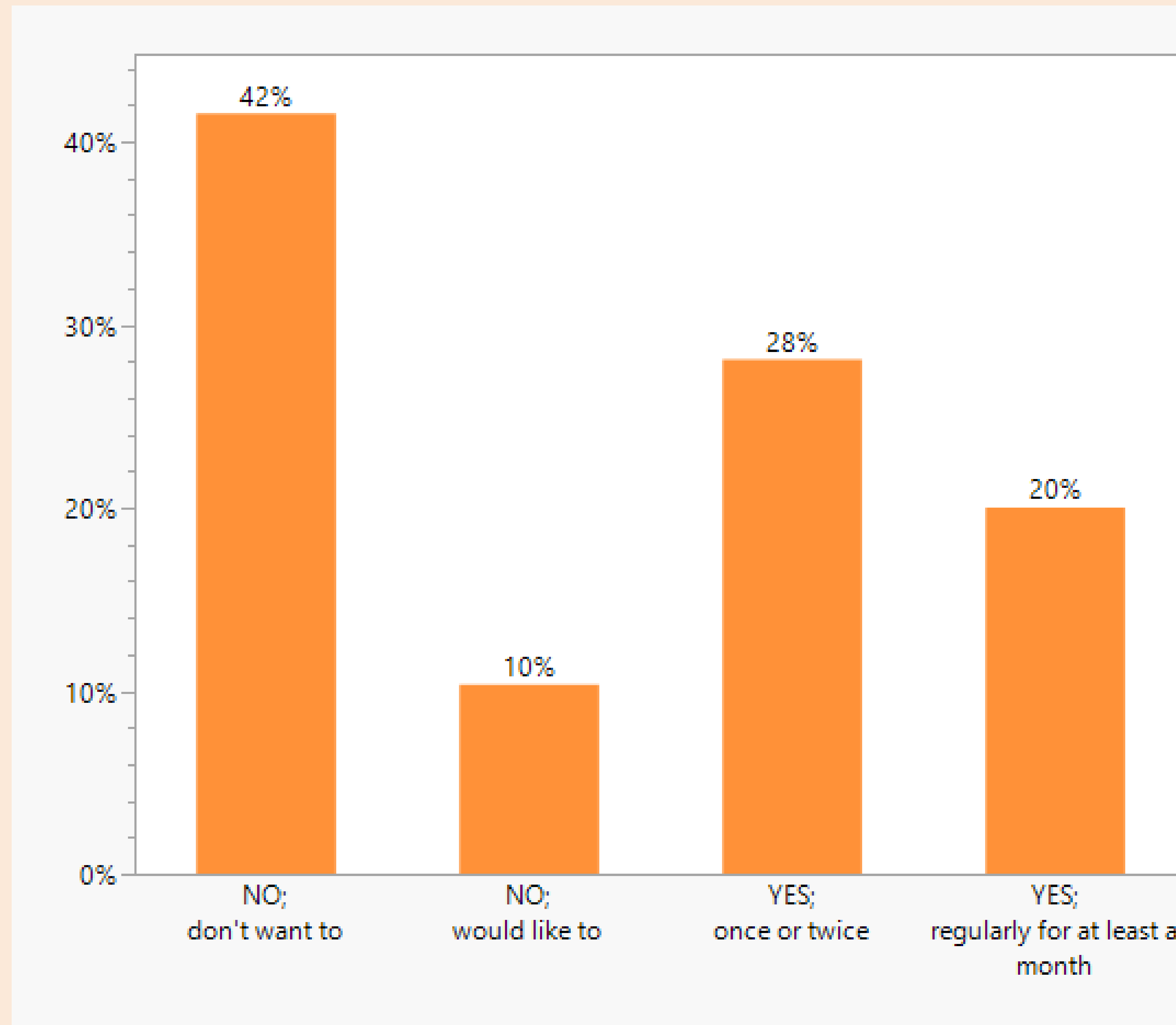
## HEALTHCARE ACCESS

Does <b>NOT</b> have access to ...	All Farmers (N=1288)
Telephone access to a psychologist	84%
Online access to a psychologist	78%
Telephone access for routine medical care	73%
In-office visit to a psychologist	73%
Online access to routine medical care	63%
Emergency medical care	63%
Recreational activities	61%
In-office routine medical care	60%
Food/groceries	45%
Basic personal care	44%



## HEALTHCARE ACCESS

**Have you ever visited a mental health professional or counselor?**



## COPING MECHANISMS

(Outlets that people use to cope with stress and anxiety)

Coping mechanism	All (N=1288)
Exercise/walk	39%
Talk to family or friends	31%
Engage in a hobby	28%
Drink alcohol	27%
Watch TV or read	27%
Sleep	22%
Pray or other religious	18%
Spend time alone	17%
Spend time with pets	15%
Draw or paint	12%
Meditate	11%
Hit or kick things	6%
Cannabis	5%
Hit or injure myself	5%
Write in Journal	5%
Other Illicit drugs	4%
Talk to counselor	4%
OTC drugs	2%

## CONCLUSION

- Farming is a stressful occupation
- A third had suicidal ideation at least once in the past year; first generation farmers more than half.
- Less than one in four had access to a psychologist
- Stressors were diverse
- Coping mechanisms included alcohol in top 5

Critical need for more research and tailored interventions for farmer mental wellbeing.

# CONTACT INFO & QUESTIONS

Anne Montgomery, PhD – Biostatistician, Georgia Rural Health Innovation Center

[montgomery\\_a@mercer.edu](mailto:montgomery_a@mercer.edu)

Stephanie Basey, MSHS – PhD Student Rural Health Sciences, Mercer University

[stephanie.michelle.basey@live.mercer.edu](mailto:stephanie.michelle.basey@live.mercer.edu)

Ben West, MBA – PhD Student Rural Health Sciences, Mercer University

[herman.benjamin.west@live.mercer.edu](mailto:herman.benjamin.west@live.mercer.edu)

Chris Scoggins, MPH – Director of Special Projects, Georgia Rural Health Innovation Center

[scoggins\\_ct@mercer.edu](mailto:scoggins_ct@mercer.edu)



Visit

<https://www.georgiaruralhealth.org/farmworkersurvey/>

to read our pilot report, or to sign up to receive the statewide report once completed.